

(old Swedes) ~~Holy Trinity~~ Church  
Wilmington, Delaware  
New Castle Co.

HABS No. 9-2  
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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District No. 9

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Albert Kruse, District Officer  
Old Town Hall, Wilmington, Del.

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(OLD SWEDES) ~~HOLY TRINITY~~ CHURCH  
Seventh and Church Streets  
Wilmington, Newcastle County  
Delaware

Owner: Holy Trinity Church Corporation.

Date of Erection: 1698.

Architect: No record.

Builder: John Smart, Joseph Yard.

Present Condition: Good.

Number of Stories: One, and balcony.

Materials of Construction: Brandywine granite, and brick.

Other Existing Records: See text.<sup>1</sup>

Additional Data: See following pages.

<sup>1</sup> See also Bennett, G.F., Early Architecture of Delaware, pp. 16-25; Eggers, O.R., Sketches of Early American Architecture, 1922, plate 44; Hamlin, T.F., The American Spirit in Architecture, page 40; Ware, W.R., The Georgian Period, vol. vi, plates 379, 380; Wallace, P.B., and Dunn, W.A., Colonial Churches and Meeting Houses, pp. 244-250; Embury, A., Early American Churches, pp. 36, 37.

(OLD SWEDES) ~~HOLY~~ TRINITY CHURCH  
Wilmington, Delaware

The cornerstone was laid by a group of Swedish Lutherans on May 28, 1698 on the north end of the east gable, and the church dedicated Trinity Sunday, June 4, 1699. The site selected had been used for sixty years as a burial place. The church is of stone with brick trim around the openings, and as originally built it had only four walls with hooded gable ends. Soon after completion the side walls began to spread. To support them as buttresses two small porticos were built on the north in 1749 and a larger on the south in 1762. The former have been enclosed (date unknown) and the north east used as a sacristy and the north-west as a choir room. Across the south portico is an iron gate erected in 1899.

According to the original specifications the doors, two large and one small; and windows, one large and four small; are arched and quoined with brick. When erecting these doors a mistake was made in the dimensions of the north west door. This discrepancy is still evident. The doors on the north and west were renewed in 1751 and the south one in 1758. The original hinges are still on these doors and on the south door is one of the old locks. The one large and four small windows were renewed in 1749, 1753, and again in 1830 when stone sills were added. In 1774 the window in the west gable was cut to furnish light for the gallery. None of the windows, therefore, are the original ones. The windows in the

east gable and in the north wall have been reinforced with an additional brick arch ring at an unknown date.

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Iron letters forming historical data and scripture phrases were placed on the four original exterior walls. Those on the west front were removed when the belfry was erected but the lettering on the other walls still remains in part. The complete texts may be found published in the "Records of Holy Trinity".

The tower and the belfry were built in 1802. The wooden belfry entirely rebuilt in exact duplicate in 1898, except for the use of copper shingles instead of wooden ones. From 1717 to 1802 the belfry had been on the north side "down by the east corner of the church right opposite a walnut tree". The original bell was given by Captain James Trent who left it with a man in Marcus Hook. Hans Pielterson, at that time in opposition to the church, "lied it out from" the man, but the bell was returned later. In 1772 a new bell, four times as large as the old one, subscribed by the congregation, arrived from England. The old steeple was repaired and a new stone tower built at the west end of the church to receive the bell which later hung in the belfry built in 1802. The present arrow in the weather vane is the third. The upright rod is probably the original one set up in 1802.

In 1774 the gallery was built with a stairway to it from the south portico. In 1842 this stairway was removed and placed inside, but in 1898<sup>was</sup> rebuilt in its original place in the south portico where it is now.

\* More correctly: "lied it away from".

The original brick floor remains in the main aisle but the bricks in the cross aisle have been relaid and some are new—a fact patent to even the casual observer. The brick floor around the altar and under the choir stalls, and the organ console, and the cut stone leading to the original wooden altar rail enclosing the altar are all of modern construction and were placed there about 1928 in spite of protest as the original platform, steps and altar rail were of wood. There are two tablets marking the graves in the floor and the records show five other interments within the church.

The pews are arranged according to the original plan, except those in the chancel. The only original pews are those installed in the gallery in 1774, the others having been erected in 1898 and modelled chiefly on those in the gallery. All the original pews were made of fir.

Until 1793 the pulpit stood between the north porches, then rested on the altar for many years, later removed to a place to the left of it and finally in 1899 to its present place as originally located between the north porches. The present base and steps to the pulpit were added in 1898 and designed without any definite knowledge of the original.

The original altar, built of stone, is now enclosed in a new altar of unpolished Rutland marble erected in 1899 as a memorial to the twelve former Swedish ministers, and their names are inscribed on the southerly end. It bears an inscription on the north side, "This altar encloses the original". The original altar is hollow and the records say "built with a little room

under". On the north end is a small wooden door about one foot square. This old altar is out of plumb in the front.

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Services were held in the church until 1830 when the congregation moved to Fifth and King Streets. Until 1842 services were discontinued and the church fell into decay. At this time, due partly to a bequest from Henrietta Allmond, repairs were made. Again in 1898 under the direction of Mr. Wm. H. Mersereau, an architect of New York, and the firm of Ferguson and Brown of Brooklyn, New York, a complete restoration was made. It is now in excellent condition and is probably the oldest church in the United States of America now standing and used for the worship of God.<sup>1</sup>

*Northy A. Mendinhall*  
Approved by  
*Albert Bruce*

References--The records of Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church.  
Published by the Historical Society of Delaware.

History of Wilmington by Benj. Ferris

Personal records of Judge C. M. Curtis, Wilmington, Delaware.

<sup>1</sup>Among the exceptions would be St. Luke's Church, Virginia, ca. 1632.